

Investing in Quality

Year 7 Report



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Executive Summary Year 7 Report

This report describes the progress made during year 7 of the four strategic priorities of the Investing in Quality Initiative (IIQ). The first section describes the approaches to and highlights of the professional development offered in the community during year 7, including the number of events, number of participants and examples of feedback received. The professional development described includes both IIQ led and IIQ supported events.

An overview of the mentor visits to programs can be found in the second section, including common strengths observed during visits, and examples of what programs are considering as they move forward with Ontario's vision for the early years, including the study of How Does Learning Happen?

Detailed in the third section is the second year of the revised RTB submission, which includes peer dialogue. Programs submitted information on family and staff surveys, environmental surveys, and staff professional learning and engagement. It should be noted that Raising the Bar is no longer promoted or supported by the developers, Affiliated Services for Young Children (ASCY), Hamilton. Instead communities are encouraged to consider approaches to quality that are best suited to them. To this end the submissions and the mentor visits informed the recommendations for moving forward with the Initiative which can be found at the end of each section.

Introduction

This report describes the progress made in 2016 with the strategic priorities identified in the operational plan (2015) that set the stage for the Investing in Quality, Peterborough (IIQ) Committee's future and its role in advancing quality in the City and County of Peterborough. The four priorities identified are:

- 1) Champion professional learning that influences practice
- 2) Enhance learning through mentorship
- 3) Meaningful measurement for quality improvement
- 4) Organizational alignment to support transformation

For agencies participating in the Raising the Bar initiative this was the second year of using the revised submission requirements along with the expectation to participate in peer dialogue. Information and data used in this report has been gathered from a number of sources, including Raising the Bar (RTB) submissions, peer dialogue days, professional learning opportunities and mentor visits. Examples from programs and quotes from participants have been included, with their permission.

It is important to place this report in the greater local and provincial context. The early learning care sector has, and continues to undergo significant change in Ontario. Some of the key legislated changes include the Child and Early Years Act (2015) with Phase Two coming into effect in September 2016. Further, the College of ECE (CECE) continuous professional learning became mandatory in September 2016.

The release of HDLH? (2014) articulated an aspirational vision for the early years provoking a deep and thoughtful examination of existing practices. We are beginning to see an evolution in understanding around supporting and growing quality that aligns with the values articulated in HDLH? To this end Affiliated Services for Young Children (ASCY), the developers of RTB, reviewed its role in the province

and put aside RTB, no longer supporting or promoting it as it existed. Instead communities are encouraged to consider and/ or develop materials that are best suited to them. Peterborough is one of a number of communities that had implemented RTB. This leaves the community charged with considering ways to support and grow quality as the initiative moves forward.

Undoubtedly all of these factors impacted the local early learning sector and influenced the implementation of the priorities of the strategic plan. This report contains four sections each reporting on one of the strategic priorities with recommendations for moving forward with the initiative.

Strategic Priority 1: Champion Professional Learning that Influences Practice

The awareness of the role of professional learning in supporting quality continues to grow. The most important part of this priority is influencing practice. It is possible for people to attend numerous events for 'professional development' and yet their practice can remain static. As a community, we want to shift our focus from the number of hours or events to the influence it has on the day to day experience with children, families and colleagues. As noted in the report from the professional learning survey, "The intent is for it (professional learning) to have an impact on daily practice, whether with children, families or staff. The goal of all professional learning is to influence practice in a positive way. This change often takes place over time and is usually not immediate." (Professional Learning Survey 2016)

In this second year of following the Strategic Plan, '*How Does Learning Happen?*' continued to be a central focus as programs and educators became more familiar with the vision and bringing it into programs.

Events

Communities of Practice (For attendance numbers, see chart at end of section)

To support the study of HDLH?, we have been introducing Communities of Practice (CoP) as an approach to think and learn together. The mixed groupings, guiding questions and facilitated conversations help to gather multiple perspectives as we move forward. Although there were mixed reactions initially, participants are seeing the benefits of this as it becomes more familiar and there is evidence that a shift in thinking is occurring. For example, a participant at one event where there was not mixed seating, recognizing the benefit of multiple perspectives, commented with a smile that 'this would have been a good time to divide the group'. This comment would not have been made a couple of years ago.

This year there were three CoPs which took place. Offered previously, a series on '*How Does Learning Happen?*' was offered again in the fall along with a new series - '*Observation and Documentation*'. This was seen as a natural extension from the first series on the pedagogy. The Observation and Documentation series was very popular as members of the community sought to deepen their understanding of this practice. As a result, it was offered a second time in the fall and then again in the spring of 2016.

Participant comments:

- *"(I liked) getting us to think about new things and different perspectives" (HDLH?)*
- *"(I became more aware of)... others...it is hard sometimes to see others' interpretations of a situation - these sessions gave you that opportunity" (HDLH?)*

Pedagogical Leadership (CoP)

This was offered to those in supervisory roles over 2 full days in the fall. There is recognition that the role of leadership in early learning is changing rapidly. As leaders supporting the growth and development of educators, the sessions explored four focuses of Pedagogical Leaders: vision and values; building strong relationships; nurturing dispositions that are useful in our work; and embedding professional development in day-to-day practice.

Participant comments:

- *"It was rewarding to be in a group setting and to be able to share ideas and take feedback from others. I enjoyed doing things hands-on and working as a team. I view everyone at my table as a 'mentor'."*
- *"The idea of 'growing people' really resonated with me."*
- *"..the idea that I need to start the journey of reflective practice, pedagogical learning and wholehearted work with myself. Listening to my own instincts and treating myself the way I hope to treat my team."*

Nature Play (2 events)

Adam and Jill Bienenstock are strong advocates for connecting children (and adults) with nature. During the full day in October, participants were able to learn about key principles for designing outdoor spaces. There was much discussion around using natural elements as well as several hands-on experiences to offer children. Information was provided on the importance of offering challenge to children and the health benefits of outdoor play. There was also discussion on how to work with agencies who oversee outdoor environments. Participants were encouraged to use critical thinking skills to question and understand recommendations and also to be able to advocate for their plans.

Due to funding from the Healthy Kids Community Challenge, we were able to bring Adam and Jill back for a half-day workshop in May on additional outdoor activities for spring and summer. This aligned well with *HDLH?* which states "many early years programs are beginning to view their outdoor playgrounds as places for discovery and learning with bodies, minds, and senses rather than just places to blow off steam." (p.32)

Participant comments:

- *"promote visioning and planning for creative spaces with colleagues to spread the wealth of learning that can happen"*
- *"create spaces for children that inspire them to think differently and connect with the world around them. Question my certainties and change my theories by thinking with the children"*
- *"a reminder to myself of how natural materials are essential for child development. I can challenge **why** we are not allowed to use some materials by using current knowledgeable resources and promote and advocate for their importance!"*

- *"encouraging children /other educators to embrace natural materials and outdoor learning environment"*



Outdoor nature play



Designing playgrounds with Adam Bienenstock

Early Learning and Child Care Conference

The fifth year of the conference saw keynote speaker Susan Stacey, author of three books on early learning, share her perspective on emergent curriculum and reflective practice. These are both key areas of interest and learning for our community. This year continues the intent of keynote speakers with a direct connection to the early learning and care sector. A warm and approachable presenter, she shared her enthusiasm and curiosity which set the tone for the day.

The conference seeks to offer a broad range of topics for a diverse audience including RECEs (both local and from out of area) who work in child care and family support, as well as Home Child Care providers and DECEs. The involvement of ECE students at Fleming is also welcomed.

Participant comments:

- *(keynote) "... thought it would be a boring topic but it hooked me in a matter of moments"*
- *(keynote) "...a great way of looking at how children think"*
- *"wonderful day! love that you are keeping up with all the changes and support it"*
- *"the workshops were very beneficial - some new info and refreshers"*

Cooks Conference

For the first time this year, this event took place in the new community kitchen space of Peterborough Public Health. Also new this year was collaboration with the Haliburton Kawartha Pineridge Health Unit. Dietitians from both health units, along with the chef from the Loblaw Superstore, celebrated the Year of Pulses. This topic was very timely as it touched on healthy recipes, ease of use and budget friendly ingredients.

This event can also be seen as supporting all four foundations from HDLH?.

- Well-being: healthy approaches to food and eating
- Belonging: coming together as a part of a group to learn and share together
- Engagement: the hands-on aspect of the event
- Expression: acknowledging the importance of food and cooking for the participants as they bring their own personalities to their role

Recognizing that change takes place over time, these conferences offer dietary staff exposure to new ideas and/or ingredients that will influence the menus for children but may also extend to the dietary staff themselves and their families, the families of the children and also the other staff in the programs.

Participant comments:

- *" very informative yet fun at the same time "*
- *"...having it (the food) made for us - it's always nice to be valued like that."*
- *"(I liked the) different creative ways to use pulses/ new recipes"*

Networks

Networks continue to operate for four groups: Early Learning (infant/toddler/preschool), School Age, Cooks and Supervisors. Several school age meetings this past year were supported by Kinark staff and were very well attended.

As we move to support more reflective practice, the recent Early Learning meetings have offered a broad topic for open discussion with IIQ staff facilitating. For example, there were discussions on how

people and programs are approaching the idea of 'circle', managing risk and using 'loose parts'. The idea that there is benefit in hearing different perspectives is central to moving from a place of certainty to a place of curiosity.

Up until the end of 2014 there were separate networks for Infant/Toddler and for Preschool. Combining the ages was the result of lower attendance. In this year's professional survey, one comment expressed disappointment about the combined Infant /Toddler and the Preschool networks. At the meeting in September, there was a specific intent to make the content relevant to all age groups.

The Supervisor's network, organized by two supervisors, runs independently with support from IIQ staff. It met six times during this period.

Self-Directed Learning

Self-directed learning continues to be an important aspect of professional learning, particularly with the beginning of Continuous Professional Learning (CPL) for the College of ECE. Attention was drawn to it in the professional learning survey. We have also made information and resources available on the website, promoted it during networks and program visits, included it in the professional learning survey and in newsletters and this will continue.

One home child care agency has had several providers access the articles and supporting documents on the website.

- *"..... I've also seen changes in practice where a provider is no longer uncomfortable with gun play and has changed her response to children because of the information in the article on gun play."*
Jenny Duley, CELC Home Child Care

Community Presentations

This year saw a number of opportunities from community partners who support the early learning and child care sector.

- The growth in school-age programs and the questions and challenges which educators encounter indicated a need in this area. This year staff from Kinark presented two workshops based on chapters from **'Mind in the Making: the Seven Essential Skills Every Child Needs'**. These two sessions were very well received and a third was planned for the fall of 2016.
- **Teacher Talk A**, which has been offered in the past few years, was again offered in June with staff from Five Counties Children's Centre.
- **ECERS-R** was offered for those interested in learning more about how to use it
- Due to the new requirements for **program statements**, Glory Ressler from Mothercraft facilitated a work session on drafting a statement.
 - *"Looking at policies of continuous professional learning and policy statement in a different light." (participant)*
- A presentation on **Dealing with Grief** was delivered by David Kennedy from Hospice.
 - *"excellent information around grieving"*

Activity	Number	Hours offered	Attendance	Total hours of participation
Events	17	83	563	2826

	Event	Attendance
1	Nature Play (IIQ / Bienenstock)	80
2	Mind in the Making (1) (Kinark)	26 /
3	Mind in the Making (2) (Kinark)	31
4	HDLH? COP (IIQ)	22
5	Dealing with Grief	38
6	Observation and Documentation COP (3) (IIQ)	30 / 32 /38
7	Pedagogical Leadership (IIQ / Lorrie Baird)	26
8	Glory Ressler (IIQ with CKL and Northumberland)	32
9	ECERS-R (IIQ)	8
10	Early Learning and Care Conference (IIQ)	163 (122 local)
11	Centre Tours	40
12	Teacher Talk A (Five Counties CC)	16
13	Nature Play (2) (keynote and workshop) (IIQ/Bienenstock)	35
14	Cooks' Conference (IIQ / PPH)	25
15	Cooks' Network	45
16	Early learning Network	48
17	School Age (Get Outdoors with SA/ Trent U)	47 (33)

Moving forward

- continue to offer a variety of opportunities for the local community with many based on a COP model
- ensure there are ongoing events to support leadership development

Strategic Priority 2: Enhance Learning through Mentorship

In keeping with strategic priority number two, the goal for 2015-16 was for IIQ staff to visit each program at least once over the course of the year. 29 programs were visited in the year.

Given the scope of the work and somewhat limited resources, the IIQ staff were guided to work collaboratively with program supervisors to support them with mentoring educators IIQ staff began by making contact, usually by phone, with each program to set up an initial visit to explain the new approach, and set goals for the first mentor visit.

At these initial meetings, IIQ staff discussed the new approach, the overall goals for the program and the resources needed to move forward. The supervisor determined which room should be the focus of the visit, the reasons for this and anything to which they would like the IIQ staff to pay particular attention. Further, IIQ staff explained that a reflective checklist would be used as a guide to the visit. A strength based approach would be taken, where both strengths and things to consider would be identified.

After each visit, IIQ staff prepared a written summary of the visit and scheduled a follow-up meeting with the supervisor, and, on occasion, with staff. After the meeting the summary was updated to reflect the discussion and then an electronic version emailed to the program. Paper copies of the summary were also made available for both the supervisor and the room staff involved. Electronic and paper copies of the visit summaries are kept on file at the IIQ office.

The visit summaries identified strengths observed in the mentor visits. Examples include relationships between educators and children, welcoming and homelike environments, positive educator practice, and the materials available to children.

In the visits IIQ visitors discussed areas for consideration. These were often areas programs were already working on and the visit provided an opportunity to share perspectives. Again we see the influence of HDLH? and the Code of Ethics as educators reflect on practice. The areas identified included increasing the complexity of materials available for the children, the continued study of observation and documentation, deepening understanding of children's play, creating more homelike environments, and supporting children's emotional development.

The mentor/ annual visits provided opportunities for a number of practices consistent with the strategic priority.

- Developing and nurturing trusting relationships with supervisors
- Further developing leadership
- Collaborating and setting goals together to grow quality
- Bringing visibility to the IIQ initiative
- Exposing IIQ staff to the daily joys and challenges in the sector
- Providing opportunities to grow and share promising practice
- Including 'another set of eyes' to grow strengths
- Fostering engagement through a strength based approach
- Providing resources
- Improving the understanding of professional learning interests (individual and community)
- Opportunity for IIQ to study and implement the vision along with the community



Thinking together about quality during a mentor visit

Recommendations moving forward

Continue to use the annual mentor visits as opportunities to:

- influence quality through modeling and supporting promising practice
- support and develop leadership in the sector
- to study and support the study of HDLH? and the Code of Ethics and Standards of Practice
- to develop mentorship capacity for community and IIQ staff

Consider:

- Developing strategies to mentor supervisors
- Developing an inventory of diverse tools to use to reflect on environments and practices

Strategic Priority 3: Meaningful measurement for quality improvement

RTB submissions

Twenty four submissions were received and reviewed by IIQ staff. This year was the second year of the revised submission and the expectation for participating programs to participate in peer dialogue. The submissions provided valuable information to guide the committee/ community in considering how to

move forward with strategic priority number 3 now that ASCY is no longer supporting or promoting RTB as it existed.

Review of Standards

As per the submission requirements, programs reported on either 'Standard 3 - Family Survey' or 'Standard 4 - Staff Environment Survey'. Many programs choose to conduct both surveys each year.

Standard 3: Family Survey

23 programs administered surveys families. 2,192 surveys were sent out and 899 returned to give an overall return rate of 41%. A number of programs reported low return rates indicating that families were too busy to complete the survey.

Examples of promising

Program A

In year six the program gathered feedback from families on, among other things, transition times. The program considered the feedback, developed an action plan and made intentional changes around transition times. In year seven families were asked again for their feedback which led to some minor changes. The positive influences these changes had on children, families and educators is beautifully described in the program's submission. Further, the example demonstrates that this should be an ongoing cycle and that, while the issues may change, the process does not. This provides a rich example of how surveys can engage families as partners in growing quality that influences the experiences of children, families and educators.

Program B

The second example provides evidence of the connection between professional learning, engaging families and improving quality. A number of educators from the program had attended an inspiring workshop on the importance of outdoor/nature play and were highly motivated to incorporate what they learned in their program which also aligned with the program's action plan. The program began by seeking input from families. Families came on board and were instrumental in securing found materials, designing and actually creating a new outdoor space. This is an example of how surveys can create and support partnerships with families, influence quality and children's experiences. Further, this example makes visible all four of foundations in HDLH? and their significance to children, families and educators.

Recommendations moving forward:

- Through mentorship and professional learning, support all programs to engage families as partners in growing and sustaining quality in early learning environments.
- Continue to make visible how this practice aligns with the image of families as described in HDLH?
- Consider ways of sharing promising practices like the ones described above.

Standard 4 : Staff environmental surveys

Seven programs reported on administering staff environmental surveys. 82 surveys were sent out and 75 were returned to give an overall return rate of 91.5%. The submissions provided evidence that the rate of return for staff surveys remains high. This may reflect the fact that staff have been given time, for example at a staff meeting, to complete the survey or that it is a workplace policy to complete the survey.

Recommendations moving forward:

- Through mentorship and professional learning, support all programs to engage educators as partners in growing and sustaining quality in early learning environments.
- Continue to make visible how this practice aligns with the image of educators as described in HDLH? and professional expectations (i.e. Code of Ethics and Standards of Practice)
- Consider ways of sharing promising practices.

Standard 5: Environmental Assessment

There is evidence that programs are engaged in regular, and ongoing assessment of environments. A variety of tools are being used and educators are accessing training. Training on ECERS/ITERS and DECA has been offered by IIQ. In other cases training has been independently organized by programs for their staff. There is also evidence of the use of other resources like HDLH? and Code of the Ethics and Standards of Practice to consider environments and practice. While approaches that use checklists can be helpful ways to gather information, quality is influenced when educators deepen their understanding through reflective practice and consider the environment as a place of research.

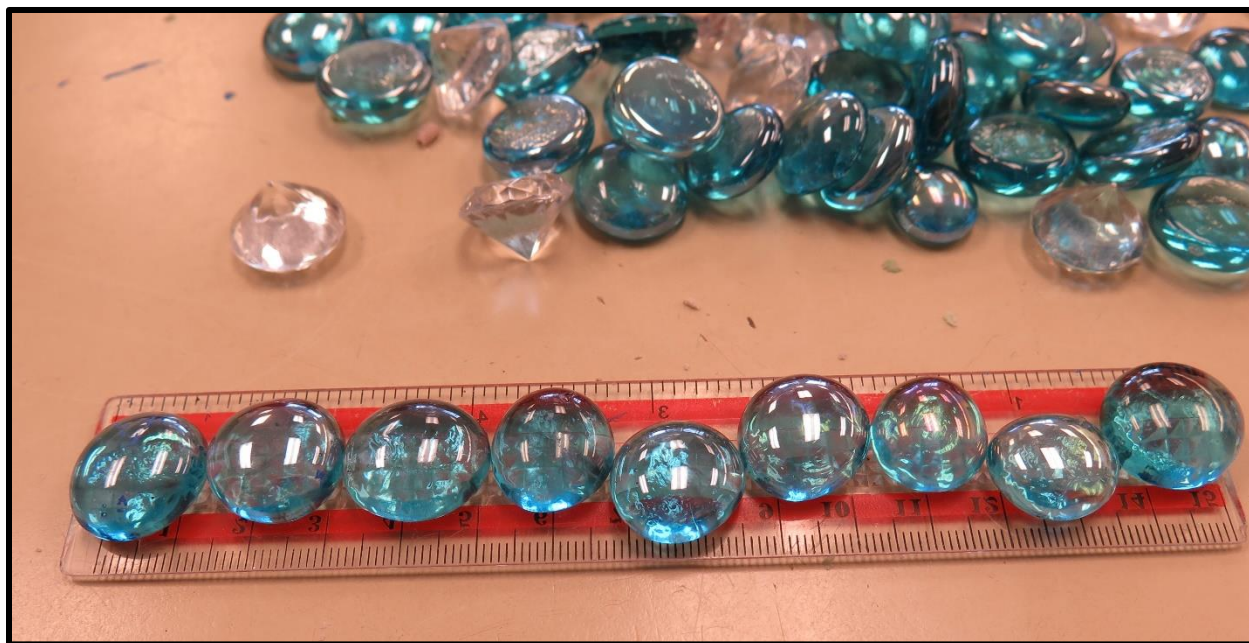
Included in submissions for Standard 5 are the third party or mentor visit summaries prepared by IIQ staff.

It is hoped that programs will carefully consider all sources of assessment and reflection on environments, including information gained through surveys and mentor visits to develop action plans intended to sustain and grow quality. This is an example from a submission:

“Our mentor visitor gave ideas on how to expand on interests and learning after doing learning stories. This helped staff reflect on their practices and environments to support the children’s goals for learning”
RTB participant

Recommendations moving forward

- For IIQ to better understand, perhaps through a survey, how programs are assessing environments including which tools are being used.
- Through mentorship and professional learning, support programs to gather and integrate information from many sources (surveys, environmental assessments, mentor visits etc.) to develop action plans to sustain and grow quality.
- Continue to make visible how this practice aligns with the vision described in HDLH? especially around the environment.



The possibility of loose parts...exploring number and measurement

Standard 16: Professional learning

Overall impression of professional learning practices

The overall impression of professional learning is consistent with previous years. Educators are engaged in a variety of professional learning opportunities to varying degrees. Opportunities include the local conference, C of P, IIQ lead, IIQ supported, self-directed, and webinars.

The 102 educators who reached the platinum level (20 or more hours or 10 or more events) are exceeding this amount, while many not reaching the platinum level are completing a minimum amount to meet RTB (8 hours, 4 events) requirements. There may be a number of reasons for this, including individual circumstances, program policies, and capacity to support educators to access professional learning. This could include financial capacity, and ability to cover staff and provide, lieu time.

Supervisors across programs are engaging in a significant amount and variety of professional learning. The submissions provided a source of information to determine the effectiveness of professional learning offered and supported by IIQ. Aware of the global interest in nature play and outdoor environments, IIQ supported 2 workshops by Bienenstock (October 2015 and May 2016) as well as a workshop at the local early learning conference in April 2016. The submissions show evidence of a shift in thinking about and planning outdoor environments. As mentioned previously one program acknowledged the influence of these workshops on the design and implementation of a new playground. Another educator wrote a reflection about an article on nature play she had read in the local newspaper. She described how she planned to transfer some of the recommendations in the article to her practice.

In the provision of professional learning it is important to consider the nature of learning. Often new ideas have to be presented over time in a number of ways. Learning happens when the professional learning opportunity aligns with the learner's readiness for the information. This is referred to as the

zone of proximal development (Vygotsky). New learning is then integrated into existing schemas of knowledge and, through self-reflection, a shift in practice occurs. There is evidence of this process in the submitted reflections from educators. The reflections provide a source of information for planning professional learning opportunities and resources.

Standard 17: Professional engagement

It is clear that educators continue to be engaged in their profession through memberships and networking with others. Educators met RTB requirements through membership with professional organizations such as the AECEO or subscribing to organizations such as Exchange Everyday to access free resources to support practice.

Another way to demonstrate professional engagement is through local networks. There is evidence that participation in networks has varied by network and over time. Dietary staff are consistently engaged in the Cook's Network. The School Age network on two occasions has had very high turnout (over 40 participants) related to the focus of the network. The Early Learning Network continues to evolve, influenced by the Communities of Practice approach.

Recommendations moving forward for Standards 16 and 17

- continue to offer a range of professional learning and engagement opportunities
- explore further the professional practices and interests of educators, particularly supervisors.
- continue to model and support reflective practice
- continue to model and support educators to see the early learning environment as a place of research
- continue to study HDLH? and expectations in the Code of Ethics and Standards of Practice and make these visible
- continue to further develop and model dispositions of lifelong learning

Factors going forward that may impact community:

- The CECE's mandatory CPL with the requirement for RECEs to engage in professional learning based on a self-administered self-assessment and document learning in a portfolio
- City of Kawartha Lakes (CKL) is not hosting an annual conference in 2017. A number of local educators attended this conference.

Peer Dialogue

Peer dialogue days offered opportunities for the early learning community and partners to come together for a focused discussion on Raising the Bar standards, How Does Learning Happen? and other influences on the sector.

Two peer dialogue days were held. On both days most participants were supervisors of programs or the RTB lead and were clearly confident with the questions and open about sharing their experiences and thoughts. Both days appeared to be very similar as far as level of engagement and feedback given.

IIQ staff and the facilitators noted an increased confidence speaking about their continued study of HDLH? and how it is influencing their program and practice. Several people spoke about how families are becoming more aware of the pedagogy as well.

In particular there is evidence of the shift in focus from keeping children safe to how can educators support their growing competencies. This aligns with the image of the child as capable and competent.

Discussions also took place around reviewing and adapting schedules to better meet the needs of the children, to support the foundations of HDLH? and to provide conditions that support more complex play. These practices included reducing the number of transitions the children experience.

A number of conversations took place around strategies for observation and documentation and the use of technology and to engage families in this process. 'Hi Mama' and 'See Saw' were two apps that were discussed.

Other conversations recognized the growing diversity in the community and participants shared strategies they have used to create welcoming environments and a sense of belonging.

Some participants shared the process they took to develop program statements as required by the new CCEYC act.

Feedback for both days was very positive indicating the benefits of getting together as a community. Areas that were mentioned in the reflections were the study of HDLH?(6/36), observation and documentation (7/36), using technology to engage families (3/36) and supporting children to take risk (2/36). While the feedback was very positive ...“No matter what comes of RTB we need to keep these days!” in discussions at table there appeared to an expectation for something ‘different’ for next year.



Recommendations moving forward:

- Consider ways to bring the community together to think together, share successes and promising practices
- Consider ways to further develop leadership
- Develop new questions to guide group discussions and for participant reflections

2016 Early Learning Appreciation and Recognition event.

On November 18 2016, 165 participants enjoyed an evening of celebration focusing on the foundation of expression. Camp Kawartha Director, Jacob Rodenburg, spoke about the importance to getting outdoors, paying attention to nature's expressions and modeling land stewardship to our youngest citizens.

The second presentation was from a drumming group from Thomas A. Stewart who gave an inspiring performance which included engaging the audience.

Small canvases were at each place settings for guests to enhance, demonstrating the many forms of expression and the diverse perspectives around each table.

Platinum recognition certificates will be distributed to the community in April 2017.



Jacob Rodenburg speaks at the recognition and appreciation evening.

Strategic Priority 4: Organizational Alignment to Support Transformation

The IIQ Committee has continued to support the implementation of the strategic plan. The resignation of an IIQ staff initiated discussion about the roles of the IIQ staff and the need for further clarification of our strategic direction to operationalize the quality initiative in the 'twilight' of Raising the Bar. Position descriptions were developed that supported a blended approach of staff for supporting community professional development, mentorship and quality. Further review of the strategic and operating plans will be addressed in late fall of 2016.